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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR
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WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

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SUBJECT: HAITI: POSTCARDS FROM MIRAGOANE AND PETIT-GOAVE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The towns of Miragoane and Petit Goave are case studies of how limited local resources and central government neglect constrain the viability of local government in Haiti. Municipalities are able to supply basic municipal services only sporadically. The national power company supplies electricity a few hours a day in the cities, and virtually none in rural areas. The flooding caused by tropical storms and hurricanes last August-September has made a bad situation worse. The lingering effects of those storms, and the central government's failure to deliver promised relief, have amplified both local government distrust of Port-au-Prince and local residents' frustration with their local elected leaders. In this atmosphere, local officials have little enthusiasm for upcoming elections. They fear that voters will hold them responsible in the next election for the central government's poor disaster response to the cities' needs. End summary.

Miragoane

¶2. (SBU) Poloff on November 20 visited the coastal city of Miragoane in the Nippes Department, approximately 00 kilometers from Port-au-Prince, on the northern coast of Haiti's "southern claw." The commune and adjacent communal/rural sections boast a population of 78,000 residents, 80 percent of whom live in one of the rural areas.

(Note: Population figures are from the most recent census of 200, prepared by the Haitian Institute of Statistics and Information/IHSI. End note) Assistant Mayor Mofils Jeanty and Director General of the mayor's office ("Mairie") Yves Marie Cadet told Poloff that resource constraints force the Mairie to limit its attention primarily to the commune and nearest communal section, comprising 30,000 residents.

¶3. (SBU) Jeanty said the Mairie is not able to cover salaries, school subsidies or unemployment compensation due to insufficient resources. With a monthly budget of 200,000 Haitian Gourdes (HTG), approximately USD 5,000, "it is impossible to adequately support the needs of commune residents," he complained. The Mairie employs sixty-eight people, but only a handful are permanent: a secretary, a messenger, and a housekeeper. The remaining employees are sanitation workers and "dock workers" who work sporadically on a contract basis.

Sanitation

¶4. (SBU) Sanitation is a big concern. Jeanty said the city collected tons of trash from the streets by hand and shovel in the past few months. His employees take the garbage by wheelbarrow to a nearby informal dump where it is burned.

Poloff noticed one large metal trash bin and several smaller trash 'baskets,' made of wicker material, located near the market and one large metal trash bin near the entrance to the port. The mayor said the city has no garbage or dump truck of its own, but is provided garbage trucks irregularly by the Public Works Ministry (TPTC). When the trucks arrive, the city must pay for fuel out of its meager resources. Although the city's port is the source of the high volume of trash, the port's generation of much-needed employment far outweighs the negative impact.

Employment/Commerce

15. (SBU) Unemployment in Miragoane is high. City Hall reps worry there are too many young adults who have 'nothing to do.' They expressed concern that dissatisfaction with municipal and legislative authorities seems to be growing. (Note: National unemployment is estimated at over 60 percent. End note) Jeanty acknowledged the city receives proceeds from taxes levied on high-duty items, like cars and trucks that off-load at its port. (Note: He did not specify whether these were central government or local taxes. End note) In theory, Jeanty said, the city should receive 80 percent of business taxes collected locally by the Income Tax Authority (DGI), and 20 percent of taxes collected should be remitted to the government. He was unable to quantify the amount of taxes received by the Mairie in the past year. He credited the port with creating employment for day laborers, who are often hired to off-load cargo. He said the port 'has saved Miragoane.' Unsurprisingly, a drive-by of the local market showed a typical Haitian city scene: local

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merchants selling used clothing and shoes, as well as canned goods, cooking oil and cosmetics.

Port

16. (SBU) Poloff toured the port with the directors of the port and customs. One ship docked at the port was filled with automobiles, light trucks, and mattresses. According to port director Romel Cacique, who previously worked at the National Port Authority (APN) in Port-au-Prince, port volume in Miragoane rivals Haiti's number two port (Cap Haitien in the north). Miragoane is one of Haiti's major ports for the import of used goods, such as clothing, shoes, appliances and cars, which arrive from Miami and other U.S. cities. He predicted the port might soon surpass Cap Haitien once MINUSTAH completes a larger, more modern dock near the current cargo unloading site (a former Reynolds Aluminum plant). Both directors denied major concerns about illegal cargo arriving in Miragoane by boat. Customs director Odly Dubreus said his customs officers were 'very vigilant.'

Utilities

17. (SBU) Miragoane receives what little electricity it gets from a power plant in Petit Goave, 35 kms to the east. Jeanty said the city receives a maximum of three hours of power per day. There is usually no power at night in the city, and surrounding rural areas receive no power at all. There are only ten fixed telephone land lines in the entire city of Miragoane -- five for offices including the Mayor's office, the Port Authority and the police. Wealthy residents hold the other five lines. Jeanty praised the prevalence of Digicel wireless services, but criticized cell phone company Voila as too expensive for most of the population. There are two cisterns in the city, which provide potable water to the majority of residents.

18. (SBU) Jeanty related that the region's residents complain that their lives have been 'devastated' by the hurricanes of August/September, and that they have received no help,

especially in the rural areas. He added that during the floods, people expected that ASECS (Communal Section Assemblies) and CASECS (Communal Section Administrative Councils) would help get emergency assistance to people in need. However, none arrived, so the Mairie now faces credibility problems with its constituent communities.

Disaster Assistance

¶9. (SBU) Mayoral reps say the commune and adjacent rural areas were hard hit by flooding in August/September. According to statistics from the Ministry of the Interior's Civil Protection Department (DPC), the hurricanes caused fourteen deaths, and damaged and destroyed 521 and 72 homes, respectively. Figures from the Mayor's office put the number of families rendered homeless at 600, with 389 people currently living in shelters. Jeanty said much livestock was lost, but he had no precise figures. Jeanty said the GOH provided 30,000 HTG (equivalent to USD 750) to each family who had lost a member in the storms. Jeanty lamented that ''a lot of aid is going to the Southeast Department to cities, like Jacmel and Cote de Fer,'' implying that his city was being denied its fair share. He criticized Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis for promising but not delivering 5 million HTG (USD 125,000) to each of Haiti's 140 or so communes for help to rebuild or repair houses.

Decentralization

¶10. (SBU) Jeanty and Cadet characterized decentralization as ''meaningless'' absent real authority and funding for local government. The central government controls services and fiscal support for municipalities, but they claimed it gives disproportionate support to the capital and immediately surrounding areas. They said that communes want greater administrative autonomy, but that municipalities desperately need funding for projects that generate employment, for services such as electricity and sanitation, and for construction or rehabilitation of municipal offices. Jeanty explained that many public offices (e.g., civil tribunal and social affairs) are located in private residences due to lack of public office space and funds to rehabilitate existing

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offices.

Elections Preparations

¶11. (SBU) When questioned on the city's preparations for partial Senate elections announced for next April, Jeanty and Cadet were pessimistic the commune's residents would participate in large numbers. The mayor's office recently received correspondence from the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announcing the November 24 competition in Port-au-Prince for jobs in the Departmental Electoral Councils (BEDs) and Communal Electoral Councils (BECs), but they perceive there is little enthusiasm locally for these elections. The Lespwa, Fanmis Lavalas, and OPL parties are active in the commune. Jeanty observed that OPL's chairman, Edgar LeBlanc Fils, is based in Miragoane.

Petit Goave

¶12. (SBU) Poloff heard similar themes during a visit the same day to Petit Goave, a coastal commune including twelve communal sections, located approximately 68 kilometers to the west of Port-au-Prince in the West Department (which includes Port au Prince). Mayor Marc Roland Justal and Deputy Mayor Emmanuella Osselin complained there was little support from the central government for municipal services (especially sanitation) for the population of 165,000. (Comment:

According to the Mayor's office, the population figure is only for the commune proper and two communal sections nearest the town center -- sections 11 and 12 -- not for the remaining ten sections, as there were no figures. End comment)

¶13. (SBU) Mayor Marc Roland Justal said the city does not have equipment to keep the city clean -- uncollected trash and canals overflowing because they are clogged with trash are big problems. He has few funds to pay salaries, and faces current salary arrears of 4-5 months. While two NGOs -- the International Office for Migration/IOM and Cooperative Housing Foundation/CHF -- offered in 2007 to construct a plant to convert trash into propane gas, the Mairie could not make use of the opportunity because it had no trucks to haul the trash to a plant.

Lingering Impact of Natural Disasters

¶14. (SBU) Justal and Osselin made clear their continuing concern for residents affected by the most recent hurricanes. They claimed that after Cabaret (just north of Port-au-Prince), Petit-Goave was the most affected commune in the West Department. The Department of Civil Protection (DPC) figures say there are 2,103 affected families, 23 fatalities, one person missing, 97 houses destroyed, and 2,006 homes damaged.

¶15. (SBU) Most people in the countryside rely on agriculture to earn a living, cultivating primarily rice and potatoes. Justal said floods had devastated this agricultural-based economy, sweeping away houses and carrying away livestock. Rural folk have begun moving to the city because ''they have nothing'' where they are. The hurricanes aggravated an already precarious situation, making it more difficult for people to survive and straining the municipality's limited resources.

¶16. (SBU) Justal also criticized the Prime Minister for not following through on her promise to provide 5 million gourdes (USD 125,000) to each commune for post-hurricane housing construction and rehabilitation. He criticized relief agencies and the DPC for excluding municipal leadership from the distribution of relief supplies. He complained that Port-au-Prince should have given ASECs and CASECs offices and storage facilities to expedite distribution of supplies for rural areas.

Politics

¶17. (SBU) Justal and Osselin indicate they are both members of Grand Front Centre Droit (GFCD), a local political party and the commune's largest with a claimed 60 percent following. Lespwa and Lavalas are also active in the commune

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with a 22 percent and 18 percent following, respectively. (Note: They presumably referred to the 2007 local elections for these statistics. End note) In a brief discussion of the partial Senate elections announced for April, Justal said matter-of-factly: ''We are not concerned about the election process because we know the population will not re-elect us.''

¶18. (SBU) Justal believed prospective voters were both focused on basic survival and angry that local elected leadership did not come immediately to their aid once the hurricanes hit. He said the community would hold the Mayor's office and national deputies from the region accountable during the next round of elections, whenever they were held. Rumors were circulating, warning deputies not to campaign or to risk ''harm.''

¶19. (SBU) Local government in Haiti continues to struggle to achieve basic viability. Visits to Miragoane and Petit Goave spotlighted difficulties of devolving power from Port-au-Prince to the communes in the absence of two indispensable factors: 1) adequate funding, both from Port-au-Prince and the local tax base, and 2) central government interest in empowering local government. Both Mairies complained of a dearth of financial and material resources to deliver basic services -- to pick up trash, clean canals, and repair streets. They resent their dependence on Port-au-Prince and accuse the central government of a lack of true interest in outlying communes. They point to the central government's starving them of direct assistance as evidence of the over-concentration of power in the capital. Interestingly, mayors from neither city mentioned the need for greater authority to raise revenue locally.

¶20. (SBU) The stress of post-hurricane recovery has amplified this tension. Municipal leaders in much of Haiti, in tandem with their elected representatives in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, saw the August-September natural disaster as an opportunity to make political capital by visible involvement in disaster relief. Most have been disappointed, as both the central government and international donors with their NGO implementers, fearing corruption and adhering to strict procedures, have kept post-hurricane recovery efforts largely in their own hands. Both Mayors criticized the government and local and international relief agencies for excluding them from identification of disaster-affected families and the distribution of food and relief supplies. Including local leaders in disaster relief, they opine, would have enhanced their image in the eyes of the public -- an image damaged over the past year due to outcries over the high cost of living. The ASECs and CASECs could have been further empowered, they argue, if more GOH and donor attention was given to their role as community-based representatives.
TIGHE